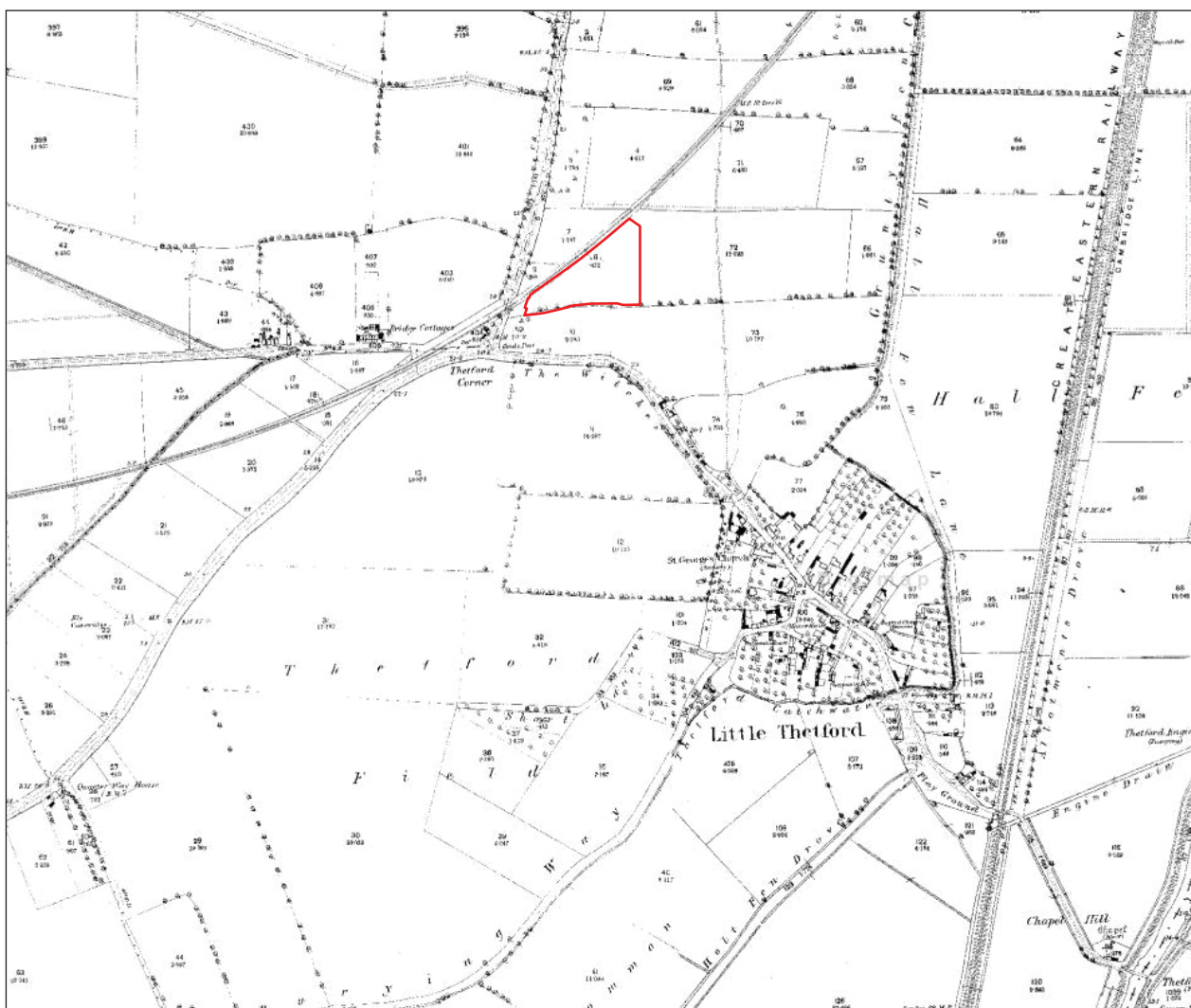


Ely Road, Little Thetford, Cambridgeshire

An Archaeological Evaluation



Jonathan Tabor
and Alasdair Wright

**Land south of Two Acres Caravan Park, Ely Road,
Little Thetford, Cambridgeshire**

An Archaeological Evaluation

Jonathan L. Tabor and Alasdair Wright

Illustrations by Bryan Crossan

Cambridge Archaeological Unit
University of Cambridge

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Summary

A trial trench based archaeological evaluation was undertaken by Cambridge Archaeological Unit (CAU) on land to the south of the Two Acres Caravan Park, Ely Road, Little Thetford, Cambridgeshire (TL 5290 7669) between 26th and 29th March 2018. Five trenches totalling 245m in length were excavated revealing a total of nine archaeological features.

The majority of features recorded by the evaluation were ditches and appear likely to relate to agricultural activity. These include a series of parallel gullies and a potentially associated boundary, which whilst undated, are reminiscent of features often interpreted as planting beds; thought to be Roman in date similar features have been recorded on a number of other sites in the locale. A single ditch, which yielded a medieval/post-medieval iron key represents slightly later activity, whilst potential evidence of the former Ely and St. Ives Railway was recorded in the form of a deposit of sand found at two locations corresponding to the railway's former course.

INTRODUCTION

A trial trench based archaeological evaluation was undertaken by Cambridge Archaeological Unit (CAU) on land to the south of the Two Acres Caravan Park, Ely Road, Little Thetford, Cambridgeshire (TL 5290 7669) between 26th and 29th March 2018. The development area is currently uncultivated agricultural land and covers c.1.2ha. The planned development comprises up to ten residential dwellings (Planning Ref: 16/00057/OUM).

Five trenches totalling 245m in length were excavated (Figure 1) revealing a total of nine archaeological features.

The project was undertaken in order to address a condition placed upon outline planning consent. Work was carried out in accordance with a project design specification (Beadsmoore 2018) produced by the CAU in response to a brief issued by the Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Team (Stewart 2018).

The work was commissioned by Annington Property Limited and the site code was ERT16. The site archive is currently stored at the CAU pending deposition with the Cambridgeshire County Council archaeological archive storage facility following the gaining of transfer of title.

Location, Topography and Geology

The PDA is an approximately triangular plot located to the north of Little Thetford and currently comprises uncultivated agricultural land; it is bounded to the northwest by the Two Acres Caravan Park and by open agricultural land to the northeast. To the south, the site borders gardens to the rear of residential properties on *The Wytches*.

The PDA is relatively flat and situated at approximately 6m AOD. The underlying geology comprises Kimmeridge Clay (www.bgs.ac.uk/geoindex accessed 3.4.2018).

Archaeological Background and Previous Work

A relatively large number of archaeological finds spots are recorded in the vicinity of the PDA as well as a number of archaeological sites, which survive as earthworks and/or are visible as cropmarks. None, however, occur within c.200m of the PDA. In addition, two archaeological excavations have previously been undertaken in the Little Thetford area and comprise the remains of a Late Iron Age and Roman settlement site at Watson's Lane, approximately 300m to the south of the PDA (Lucas and Hinman 1996), and medieval remains within the village itself on land off the Main Street (Middleton 2018).

Prehistoric finds from the wider area include finds of Bronze Age metalwork as well as worked flint occurring both as isolated finds and as scatters. Two scatters of Neolithic/Early Bronze Age flint (MCB16258 and MCB 16253), which were

identified less than 500m from the PDA to the northwest and north of the PDA respectively are most relevant to the current project.

Roman sites in the vicinity of the PDA include both scatters of pottery/finds as well as the excavated site at Watson's Lane. The latter lies c.300m to the south of the PDA; excavations revealed the remains of a series of roundhouses within an enclosure dating to the later Iron Age (CHER CB15676) overlain by a sequence of Romano-British settlement enclosures (CHER CB15675). The settlement site yielded a relatively large quantity of Iron Age and Roman pottery as well a large faunal assemblage; associated features included three human burials and a Roman tile kiln. Aside from this, a scatter of Romano-British pottery, largely comprising grey wares but including small quantities of Samian and Nene Valley wares, is recorded c.250m to the northwest of the PDA (CHER MCB16254). A further Roman site, possibly a villa lies c.700m to the northeast of the PDA at Braham Farm where painted wall plaster, tile, samian ware and two coins have been found (CHER MCB 16084). At the same site, the extensive earthwork remains of a deserted medieval village (CHER MCB 16083) also survive together with a moated site just to the north.

Little Thetford itself is recorded as a Berewick of Ely in the Domesday Survey and in the 13th century appears to have been regarded as part of the Manor of Stretham although references are made to the 'Hayfen' of Thetford in charters of this period (Wells 1953). It is first referred to as a manor in 1539 although still probably as a subsidiary of Stretham (*ibid.*). The Church of St. George (CHER 07125) is believed to be 14th century in origin but was extensively rebuilt in the 19th century (Pevsner 1970). Other buildings of historical interest in the village largely date to the 17th/18th century although the *Roundhouse*, a thatched cottage on *Main Street*, is believed to be the stump of a Late Medieval windmill (CHER 06958). A recent excavation on land adjacent to the *Roundhouse* undertaken by the CAU has exposed the remains of medieval and post-medieval plot boundaries and limited evidence of domestic activity probably associated with former medieval properties located on *Main Street* (Middleton 2018).

Finally, the now disused line of the *Ely and St. Ives Railway* ran along the northern edge of the PDA and its route corresponds with the northwestern boundary of the site (Figure 2). The line originated as the *Ely, Haddenham and Sutton Railway* in 1866 and was extended to St. Ives in 1878. The railway closed to passengers in 1931 and was finally closed to freight in 1964.

Methodology

The trial trenching programme consisted of five trenches, a total of 245m of trenching (Figures 1 and 2). Trial trenches were excavated using a tracked 360° 20 tonne digger operating under direct archaeological supervision at all times. Trenches were located and archaeological features planned using an advanced Global Positioning System (GPS) with Ordnance Datum (OD) heights obtained. Potential archaeological features were sample excavated with all archaeological finds retained. A written record of archaeological features and soil sequences was created using the CAU recording system (see below). A digital photographic record of the trenching programme was also maintained.

The CAU recording system is an adaptation of the MoLAS system (Spence *et al*) designed to be more appropriate to 'extensive' rural settings and to facilitate effective organisation of stratigraphic data and finds plotting. The system uses the Feature (ditch, pit, posthole etc.) as the main interpreted entity. Each feature is assigned an individual number with a context group number (eg. 100) also being assigned to each individual slot excavated in that feature; context numbers are derived from this context group number (eg. 100.01, 100.02 etc.). The context sheet forms the basis of the written archive but can be supplemented by Feature sheets (for complex features) as well as 'specialist' sheets such as skeleton and timber sheets. All sections are drawn at a scale of 1:10 or 1:20 as appropriate.

The work was carried out in full accordance with the CIFA's *Standard Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluations*.

RESULTS

The following section details the results of both the trial trenching and the soil artefact sampling undertaken across the site. Archaeological features were exposed in three of the trenches (Trenches 1, 2 and 3) whilst two (Trenches 4 and 5) were completely devoid of archaeology (Figure 3).

Topsoil and subsoil sampling

Sampling of topsoil and subsoil by way of hand sorting of 90 litres of each at both ends of every trench, yielded meagre results (see Figure 3 and Appendix 1). Finds were limited to seven fragments of brick/tile probably of post-medieval date and a single sherd of pottery, a heavily abraded piece of sandy coarseware potentially of medieval origin.

Metal detecting was undertaken over topsoil/spoil heaps but failed to yield any finds apart from modern material.

Trench 2

The majority of the archaeological features were exposed in the northern half of Trench 2 in the northeastern corner of the PDA. Here, a series of four parallel ditches/gullies were aligned northwest to southeast (Figure 4). Spaced between five and nine metres apart the gullies (**Fs. 02, 03, 05 and 08**) measured 0.48-0.55m wide by 0.06-0.14m deep and yielded no finds. Consequently, although reminiscent of Roman planting bed-type features, which have been found extensively in the wider area (eg. at Downham Road; Robinson-Zeki 2017), the features are undated. One of the gullies (F.05) cut an earlier gully (**F.01**), this time aligned northeast to southwest; again devoid of any dating evidence it measured 0.3-0.57m wide by 0.1-0.13m deep and was recorded for a length of *c.* 15m. Finally, a more substantial ditch (**F.04**), which adhered to the same approximate alignment as gullies F.02 *et al.* – and, which could therefore potentially be related/contemporary – was also recorded. The ditch measured 2.05m wide by 0.56m deep and once again produced no finds (Figure 5).

The Ely and St. Ives Railway

No extant remains of the railway line survive at the site and very little evidence associated with it was exposed within the trenches. The only feature potentially associated with the railway was a thin layer of orange brown sand c.0.25m thick and measuring at least 3m across (**F.06**), which was encountered in the western end of Trench 1 and the northern end of Trench 2 (Figure 4). At both locations the deposit was sealed by topsoil and situated along the presumed course of the railway; it is unclear whether it represents a remnant of some sort of bedding layer associated with the railway construction or perhaps a back-fill material following its dismantling.

Ditch F.07/09

A shallow ditch was recorded in the western end of Trench 1 – where it was sealed by ‘railway’ deposit F.06 – and the western half of Trench 3. Aligned northwest to southeast the ditch (**F.07/09**) measured 0.38-0.42m wide by 0.12-0.15m deep and had a shallow rounded profile. The only find recovered from its single fill was an iron key potentially of later medieval date.

<104> [11.01] F.09 TR.3. An iron key with oval shaped and incomplete bow. The stem and bit are complete but heavily corroded. Total length 79mm, diameter of bow 29mm, weight 30.5g. A similar example from Norwich is illustrated in Margeson (1993, 160) and has been dated to the 14th-Mid 15th century.

Justin Wiles (May 2018)

Environmental sampling

The fills of a number of features, including ditch F.04 and ‘planting bed’ gullies, were bulk sampled for environmental sampling (plant macro-remains). However, on-site visual assessment of the soils suggested they were extremely sterile with an absence of waterlogged preservation and no evidence of charred plant remains/charcoal. Consequently – and bearing in mind that no features can be securely dated – no further processing has been undertaken.

DISCUSSION

Aside from those potentially associated with the former Ely and St.Ives Railway, all of the features recorded by the evaluation were ditches and appear likely to relate to agricultural activity. The series of parallel gullies/ditches in Trench 2 are characteristic of similar features recorded across the wider region and which are generally considered to be planting beds, usually dating to the Roman period; nearby examples include those recorded at Downham Road, Ely (Robinson-Zeki 2017). Having said that, it should be borne in mind that no finds were recovered from the features and they cannot be dated with a high degree of confidence. Ditch F.04, the

alignment of which was approximately parallel to the 'planting beds', could well represent a contemporary field boundary, whilst ditch/gully F.01 seems to represent a slightly earlier phase of boundary or indeed a different phase of planting bed-type feature. Given the known and potential Romano-British rural settlements in the vicinity (Watson's Lane and CHER MCB 16254 and 16084) the presence of features such as planting beds and field boundaries comes as no surprise and they seem likely to represent activity associated with the cultivation of agricultural land in between settlements.

Later activity is represented by ditch/gully F.07/09, which was aligned northwest to southeast and bisected the PDA, being recorded in Trenches 1 and 3. The only feature to produce any dating evidence, the iron key recovered from its fills suggests it is of medieval or potentially early post-medieval date. The boundary is not marked on early Ordnance Survey maps (Figure 2) suggesting it probably pre-dates the late 19th century however based on a single find the feature cannot be closely dated.

Finally, possible remnants of the Ely and St. Ives Railway comprised a deposit of sand encountered along its former course. Potentially the deposit represents bedding material for the railway or, perhaps more likely, was associated with ground consolidation/back-filling following its dismantling. Either way, no firm evidence of its character was encountered.

Acknowledgements

The work was commissioned by Hannah Hewitt of Annington Property Ltd. The project was managed by Emma Beadsmoore and monitored by Gemma Stewart of the Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Team. The fieldwork was directed by Alasdair Wright who was assisted on site by Sara Simões and Rachel Thomas. Site survey was undertaken by Jane Matthews the report graphics were produced by Bryan Crossan.

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APPENDIX 1

Topsoil bucket sampling results

Sample point*	Pottery	CBM	Notes	Spot date
1W	-	-	No finds	
1E	-	2	2 x brick/tile	Post-medieval?
2S	-	-	No finds	
2N	-	-	No finds	
3W	-	-	No finds	
3E	-	-	No finds	
4N	-	-	No finds	
5W	1	3	1 x Roman (?) pottery, 3 x brick/tile	Roman and Post-medieval?
5E	-	-	No finds	

* Sample points (shown in Figure 1) are referred to by trench and cardinal point eg. 5E = east end of Trench 5. Subsoil was also sampled at each location but produced no finds.

APPENDIX 2

Trench Descriptions

Trench 1		
		
Orientation	E-W	General Description: Deposits comprised topsoil overlying a thin layer of subsoil, which in turn overlay natural boulder clay. Archaeological features, comprised deposit F.06 – possibly associated with the line of the Ely and St. Ives railway – and ditch F.07, both located at the western end of the trench.
Max. Topsoil Depth (m)	0.32	
Max. Depth of subsoil/ made ground (m)	0.2	
Max. Trench Depth	0.5	
Width (m)	2	
Length (m)	44	

Trench 2



Orientation	N-S	General Description: Deposits comprised topsoil overlying a thin layer of subsoil, which in turn overlay natural boulder clay. Archaeological features comprised a series of parallel linear gullies (Fs. 2, 3,5 and 8), a ditch (F.04) and one further gully (F.01). None yielded any dating evidence.
Max. Topsoil Depth (m)	0.3	
Max. Depth of subsoil/ made ground (m)	0.3	
Max. Trench Depth	0.6	
Width (m)	2	
Length (m)	64	

Trench 3



Orientation	E-W	General Description: Deposits comprised topsoil overlying a thin layer of subsoil, which in turn overlay natural boulder clay. A single ditch/gully (F.09), the alignment of which corresponded with F.07 in Trench 1, was the only archaeological feature present. A medieval/post-medieval iron key was recovered from its fill.
Max. Topsoil Depth (m)	0.38	
Max. Depth of subsoil/ made ground (m)	0.35	
Max. Trench Depth	0.7	
Width (m)	2	
Length (m)	51	

Trench 4



Orientation	E-W	General Description: Deposits comprised topsoil overlying a thin layer of subsoil, which in turn overlay natural boulder clay. No archaeological features were encountered.
Max. Topsoil Depth (m)	0.5	
Max. Depth of subsoil/ made ground (m)	0.3	
Max. Trench Depth	0.8	
Width (m)	2	
Length (m)	50	

Trench 5

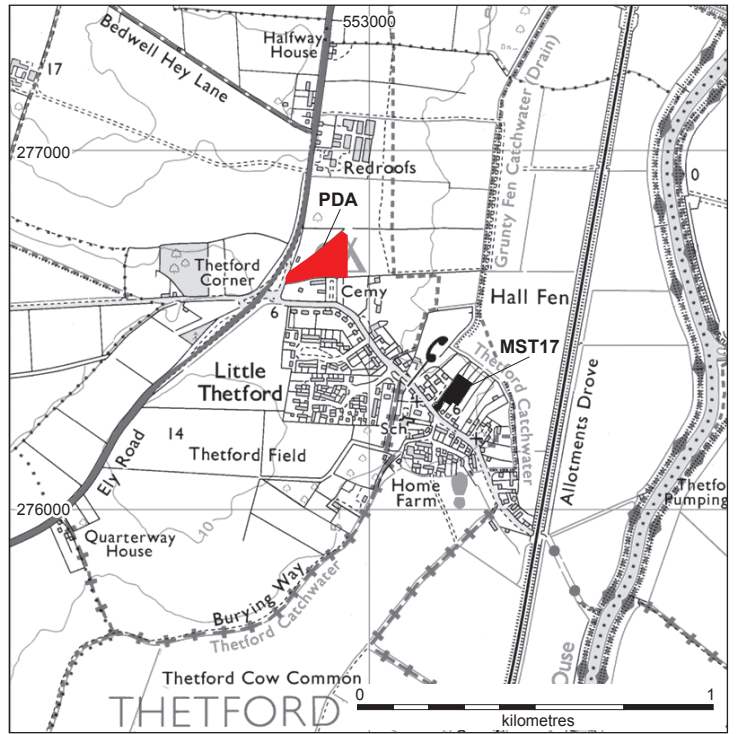


Orientation	N-S	General Description: Deposits comprised topsoil overlying a thin layer of subsoil, which in turn overlay natural boulder clay. No archaeological features were encountered.
Max. Topsoil Depth (m)	0.39	
Max. Depth of subsoil/ made ground (m)	0.31	
Max. Trench Depth	0.7	
Width (m)	2	
Length (m)	36	

APPENDIX 3

Feature List

Feature No.	Trench No.	Feature Type	Context No.	Context type	Context description	Length (m)	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Finds	
1	2	Ditch	1.01	Fill	Mid grey brown clayey silt				None	
			1.02	Cut		0.5m slot	0.3	0.1		
			2.01	Fill	Pale grey clayey silt					
			2.02	Cut		1m slot	0.57	0.13		
			9.01	Fill	Pale grey clayey silt					
			9.02	Cut		1m slot	>0.16	0.1		
2		Ditch	3.01	Fill	Pale grey brown silty clay				None	
			3.02	Cut		1m slot	0.55	0.14		
3		Ditch	4.01	Fill	Pale grey brown silty clay				None	
			4.02	Cut		1m slot	0.48	0.11		
4		Ditch	5.01	Fill	Mid grey brown clayey silt				None	
			5.02	Cut		1m slot	2.05	0.56		
5		Ditch	6.01	Fill	Mid grey clayey silt				None	
			6.02	Cut		0.8m slot	0.55	0.1m		
6		Ditch	7.01	Fill	Mid orange brown sand				None	
			7.02	Cut		N/A	3m	0.25		
7		Ditch	8.01	Fill	Dark grey brown clayey silt				None	
			8.02	Cut		1m slot	0.42	0.15		
8		Ditch	10.01	Fill	Pale brown sandy silt				None	
			10.02	Cut		1m slot	0.55	0.06		
9		Ditch	11.01	Fill	Mid brown silty clay				Iron key	
			11.02	Cut		1m slot	0.38	0.12		



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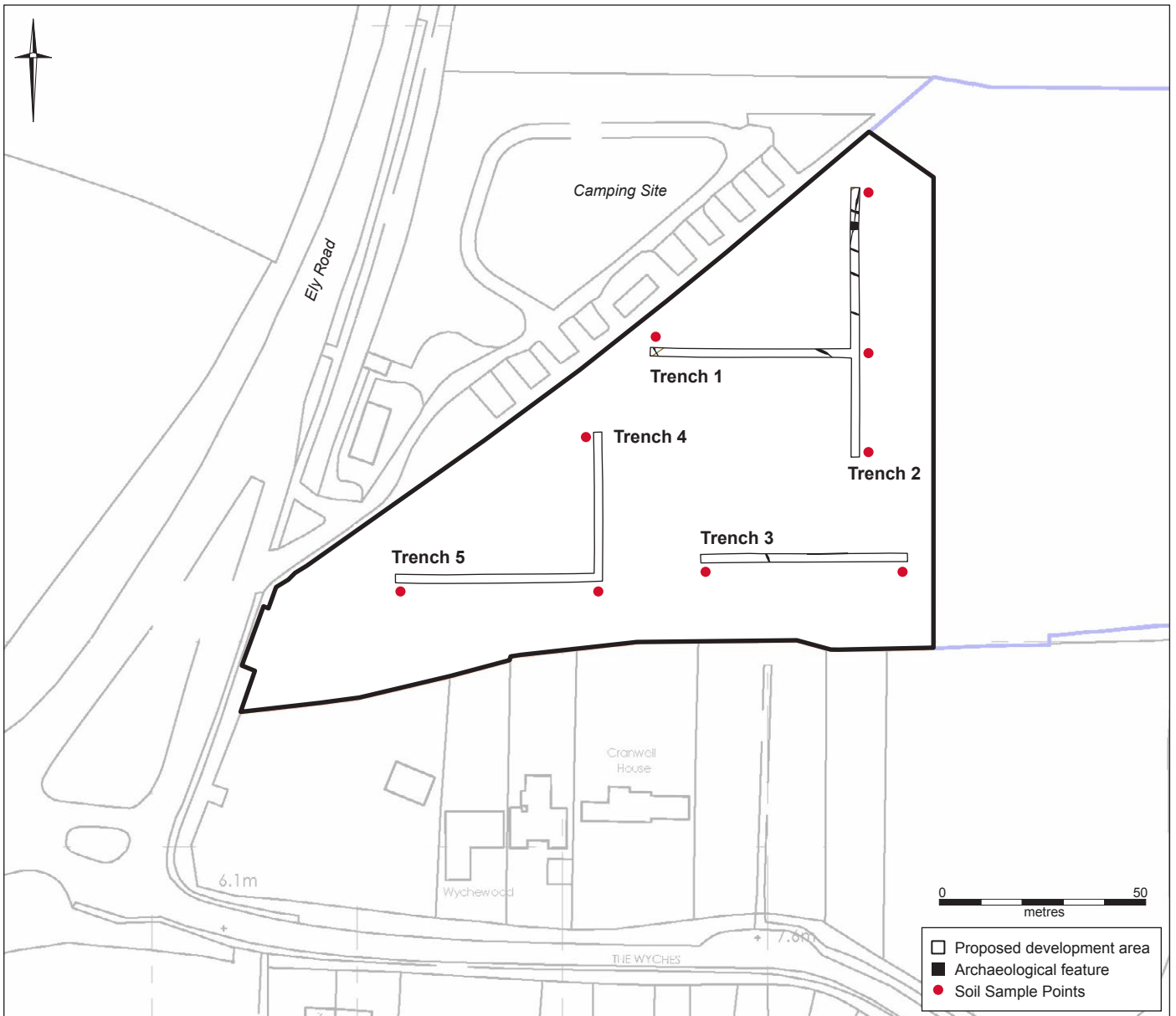


Figure 1. Location Plan

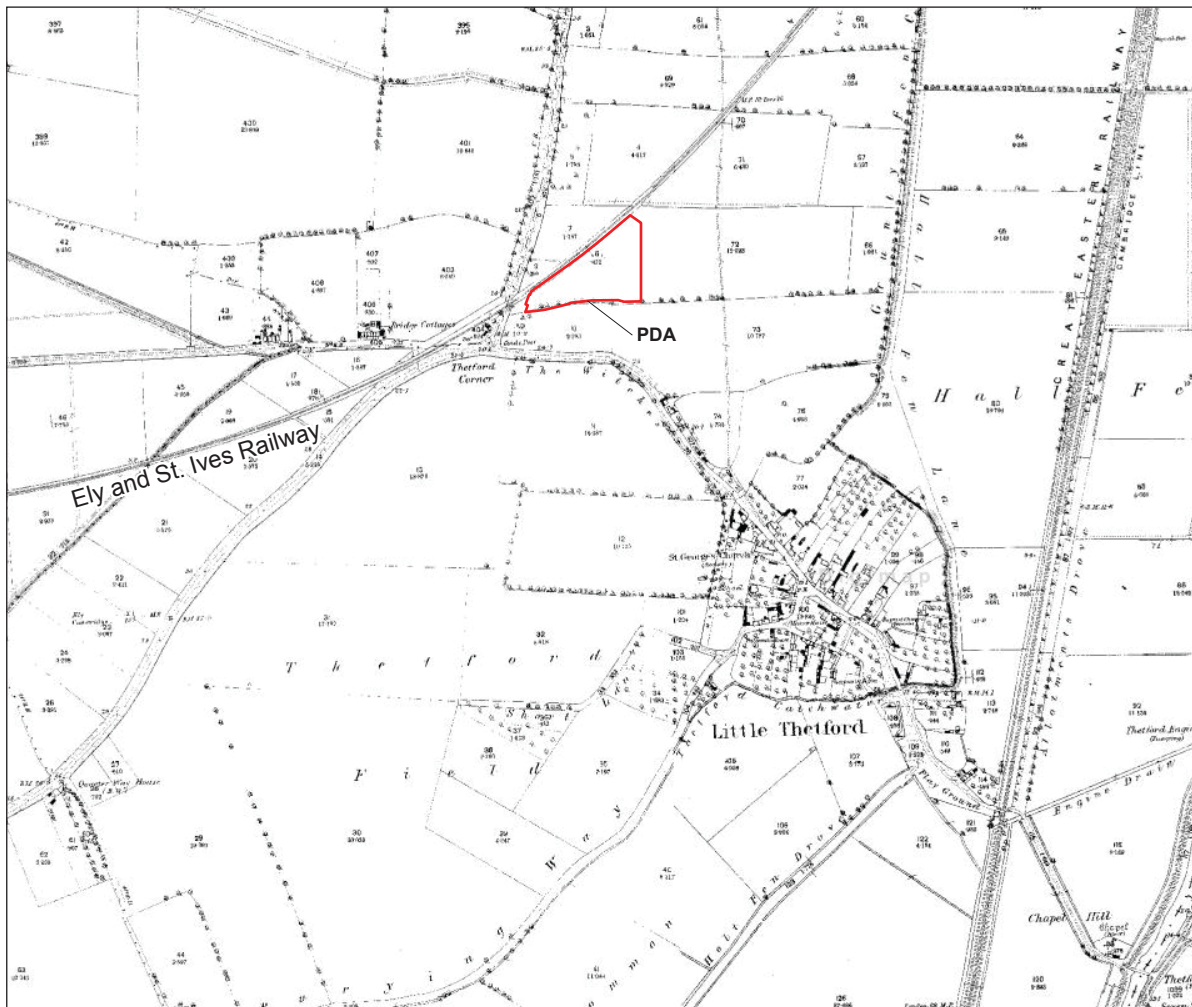


Figure 2. Ordnance Survey Map of 1888

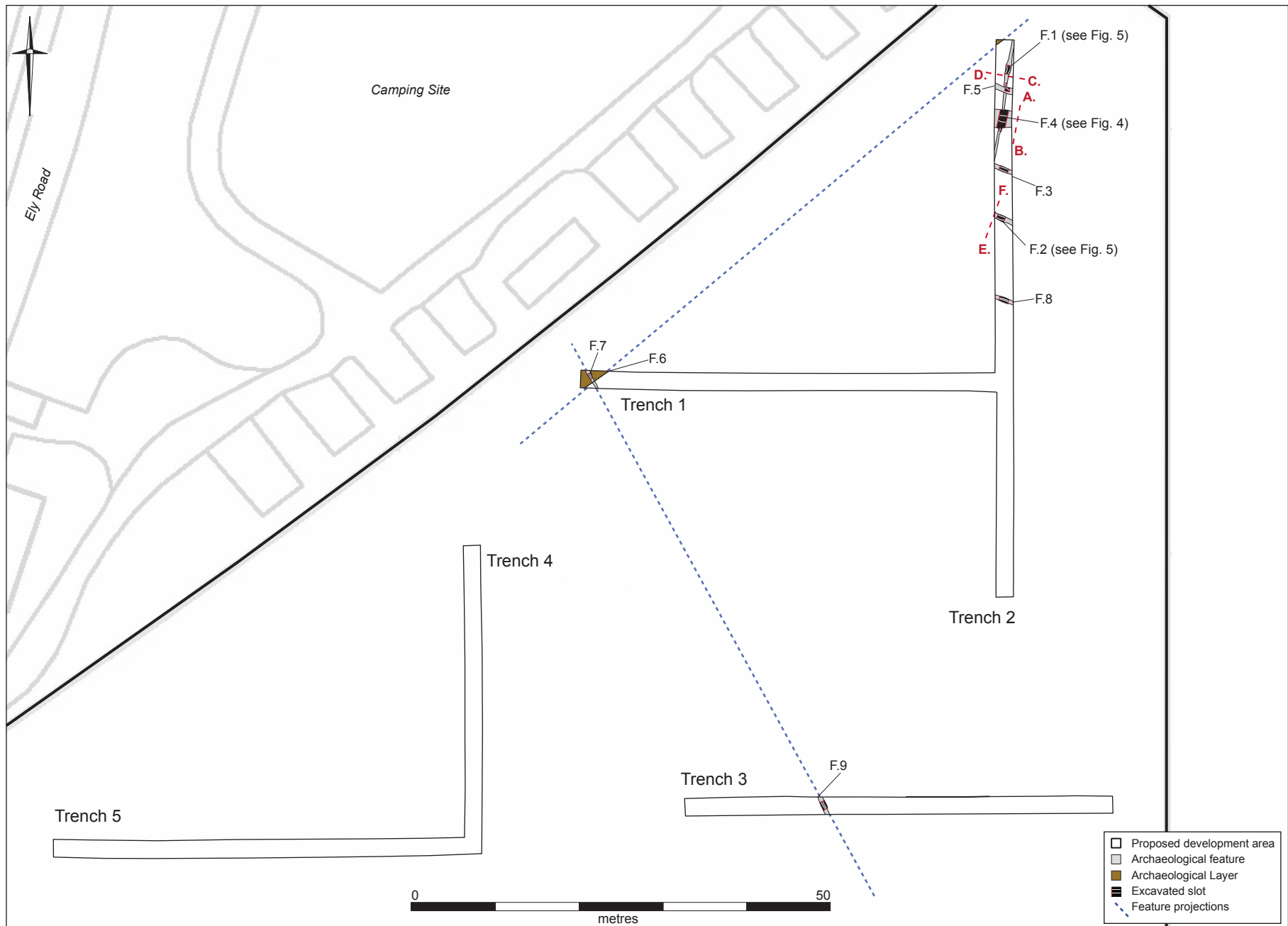


Figure 3. Trench Plan

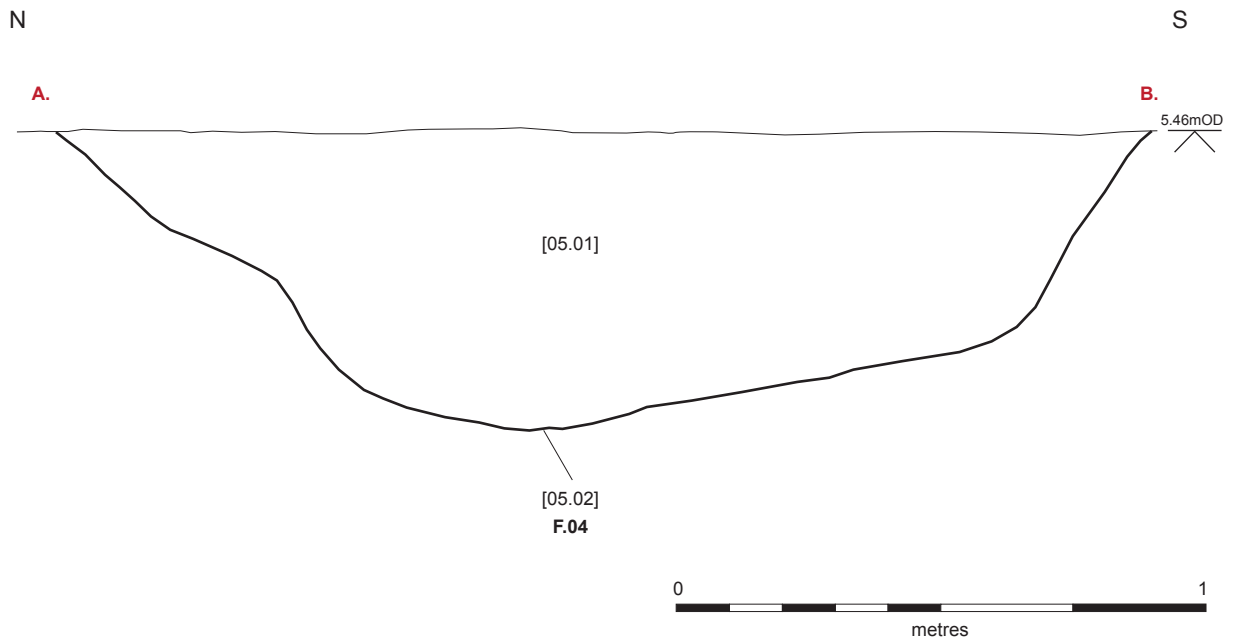


Figure 4. Photograph and section of Ditch F.04

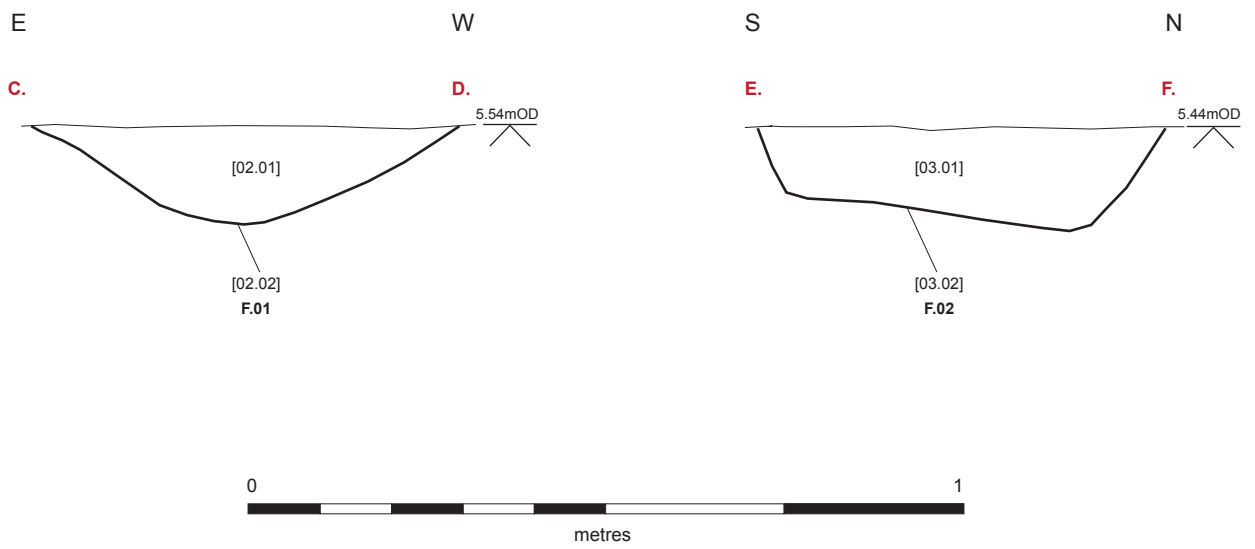


Figure 5. Ditch F.06 (photograph) and sections of F.01 and “planting bed”, F.02

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OASIS ID: cambridg3-313821

Project details

Project name	Land South of Two Acres Caravan Park, Little Thetford
Short description of the project	A trial trench based archaeological evaluation was undertaken by Cambridge Archaeological Unit (CAU) on land to the south of the Two Acres Caravan Park, Ely Road, Little Thetford, Cambridgeshire (TL 5290 7669) between 26th and 29th March 2018. Five trenches totalling 245m in length were excavated revealing a total of nine archaeological features. The majority of features recorded by the evaluation were ditches and appear likely to relate to agricultural activity. These include a series of parallel gullies and a potentially associated boundary, which whilst undated, are reminiscent of features often interpreted as planting beds; thought to be Roman in date similar features have been recorded on a number of other sites in the locale. A single ditch, which yielded a medieval/post-medieval iron key represents slightly later activity, whilst potential evidence of the former Ely and St. Ives Railway was recorded in the form of a deposit of sand found at two locations corresponding to the railway's former course.
Project dates	Start: 26-03-2018 End: 29-03-2018
Previous/future work	No / Not known
Any associated project reference codes	ECB 5362 - HER event no.
Any associated project reference codes	ERT18 - Sitecode
Type of project	Field evaluation
Site status	None
Current Land use	Cultivated Land 3 - Operations to a depth more than 0.25m
Monument type	DITCH Uncertain
Significant Finds	KEY Post Medieval
Methods & techniques	"Sample Trenches"
Development type	Housing estate
Prompt	Direction from Local Planning Authority - PPS
Position in the planning process	Pre-application

Project location

Country	England
Site location	CAMBRIDGESHIRE EAST CAMBRIDGESHIRE THETFORD Land South of Two Acres Caravan Park, Ely Road, Little Thetford
Postcode	CB6 3HG
Study area	1.2 Hectares
Site coordinates	TL 5290 7669 52.366483250177 0.245970335574 52 21 59 N 000 14 45 E Point
Height OD / Depth	Min: 6m Max: 6m

Project creators

Name of Organisation	Cambridge Archaeological Unit
Project brief originator	Local Authority Archaeologist and/or Planning Authority/advisory body
Project design originator	Emma Beadsmoore
Project director/manager	Emma Beadsmoore
Project supervisor	Alasdair Wright
Type of sponsor/funding body	Developer
Name of sponsor/funding body	Annington Property Ltd.

Project archives

Physical Archive recipient	Cambridgeshire County Archaeology Store
Physical Archive ID	ERT 18
Physical Contents	"Ceramics","Metal","Worked stone/lithics"
Digital Archive recipient	Cambridgeshire County Archaeology Store
Digital Archive ID	ERT 18
Digital Contents	"Survey"
Digital Media available	"Spreadsheets","Survey","Text"
Paper Archive recipient	Cambridgeshire County Archaeology Store
Paper Archive ID	ERT 18
Paper Contents	"Stratigraphic"
Paper Media available	"Context sheet","Plan","Report","Section"

**Project
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